
VEXATION
A DIATRIBE

BY ANDREW PRICE

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Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.--Ecclesiastes 1:14

A Diatribe

Stranger, see that sod that's creeping on that bit of ancient wall?
That's what marks the place of standing of my old ancestral hall.

Old enough it looks now in this modern day and year,
But it was the fourth my race built dating from the pioneer--

Yes, since my roving forbears with indomitable wills,
Made unlawful entry in this hollow of the hills,
Land that the warlike Iroquois held sacred from the rest,
All of the Western Waters from the Allegheny crest;

Defying royal proclamations to return and leave it all;
Holding title by the power to direct a rifle ball:

Holding on in spite of warwhoop and savage Indian foes,
Until the time had ripened and America arose

And fought the Revolution, and sounded far and near
That the tomahawk possession had become a title clear!

When the bones of Braddock's soldiers whitened in the sun and rain,
My grandsire nursed his rifle as he watched his ripening grain.
They have built a modern city where the wild deer used to come,
Through the forest's fringes you can hear the traffic hum.
I have played my part in building that sophisticated place;
I have stood for modern progress, joining in the dollar chase;
But the frost of many winters left its markings on my brow,
The sands of time are running low, and now,
I have come to where a man may whisper to a friend:
The world that was has changed for me for I can see the end!
And I want to here set down some thoughts that are vouchsafed to me,
Taking stock of a few vain things in a world that was to be.
I have seen some of the marvels that Tennyson portrays,
Heard the drumming of the motor drifting through the upper haze:
Leaned upon my hoe attracted by the clamor in the sky,
Seen the idler in his airship sail magnificently by:
Turned again to dig and labor in a field where weeds were rife,
Working out a mystery greater: That of life consuming life.
I have known young men of promise, flying on the wings of chance,
Crashing down like broken vessels on the bloody fields of France.
I have seen an ideal stifled by the cautious, midget mind,
Old and selfish, half-dead, hardened, cribbed, and cabined, and confined.
I have seen the millions slaughtered on an issue half divine,
I have seen their efforts wasted by political design,
And a fretful realm has sacrificed a place supremely high,
In a way so crude and sordid, it has odor, of the sty.
All our planning, all our fighting, all our precious, gallant dead
All our treasure, all our anguish, nearly all of life is sped,
Sacrificed upon a Moloch of the cruel greed of Trade,
The canker in the vitals of a nation unafraid
We have sinned the sin of Israel, played a stiff necked people's part;
Heeded not the admonition of an humble, contrite heart.
In the fierce, wild, money madness, aged, dying mortals writhe;
The pulpits prattle sweetly to the music of the tithe.
Money changers in the temples, wolf-like traders in the mart,
Crime triumphant in the highways, money lust in every heart, —
Naught suffices, all our blessings, di-counted ere they come,
Youth, snarling and uppish, every natural feeling dumb.
Lord, regard thy people! Restore the ancient ways,
Give us faith and wonder, grant us simpler, better days,

Truth, industry, honor, and as our days go by,
Give us peace and save us, and help us to live to die.
Can it be the same rules govern now as when I was a youth?
Day and night the quest eludes me, me, a searcher after truth.
Has the world succumbed to madness, gone to ruin and decay?
Or am I filled with sadness, and have had my little day?
In file copies of the nineties of my paper can be seen,
A positive prediction of a world war in fourteen;
Let us hope the blessing of that warning will arrive;
That the curse shall spend its power by the year of twenty-five.
The world looks better to me in every way save rest;
For hell has made its harbour in the modern mortal's breast.
The thin veneer of culture hides the horror no one sees,
The strength to keep it hidden, is prayed for on the knees.
The day of vain endeavour, the day when sinners roam,
Seeking pleasure, Pleasure calling, finds that they are not at home.
Woman once a slave and chattel knows no such word as awe.
Each one demands a chariot, walking is against the law.
And higher education, know you what that fraud is worth?
College spews them learned and barren on an unsuspecting earth.
Such hands as held the war horse, smelling battle from afar,
Now guide the noiseless progress of an easy riding car.
The wisdom of our statutes, conceived in truth and right,
Lend themselves to Avarice, and deeds as dark as night;
A breed of grasping monsters, who know not theirs from thine,
With manners of the vulture, dispositions of the swine;
Touch naught of theirs, in these modern tents of Core,
The blackness of the darkness, is theirs forevermore.
And far below those levels are the predatory hordes
Of those who covet, scowling, leaning on their naked swords,
Nerved to spring to battle. They know no fear nor dread,
Their fate could not be worsted in the shambles of the dead.
Religious thought to desperate souls affords a ray of light:
See Matthew ten verse thirty-nine. O read the words aright:
(For whosoever will save his life shall lose it;
And whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.)
The vain pursuit of pleasure destroys and doom; at length.
Trust in the Lord of Hosts: They go from strength to strength.
Let me speak to you of Alcohol, the problem of the time,
Identical with ruin, the associate of crime;

The common form the Furies take to punish and to mar,
A demon that pretends to be, benignant Avatar.

Men drank a few short years ago, resultant of life's gloom,
Lived half their lives befuddled, and went shouting to the tomb;

Debased, blear-eyed, drugged and debauched, the drunkard's sodden trend
Moved sober men to drastic laws, the nation's curse to end.

There was a time when guilt and pomp, allayed the victim's fears,
The vice was licensed, good men drank, and drifted, years and years.

The times have changed, dirt and disease attend the stealthy means,
A hidden den, a flickering light, and death behind the scenes

The furtive air, the desperate glee,—they indicate the strain,
The features of a drunkard might well have startled Cain.

These bitter men are in revolt, they argue they have cause
For systematic treason and defiance of the laws.

Observe they mingle mainly with those of their own class,
Their sophistry supported by the mouthings of the ass.

Their doctrines are the products of a changed and ruined mind:
Who would trust the eyesight, or be guided by the blind?

And what of those who pander to the solitary vice?
Their powers of salesmanship would serve to sell the lousy lice.

They judged a bet that moonshine would outstink a skunk, one day.
The pole-cat smelled the moonshine and then it swooned away.

The graves hold many secrets of the horrors of strong drink,
But human wrecks and ruins even made bar-tenders shrink.

Those feeble minded servants selling drinks across the bar
Have glimpsed the tortured spirit, the lost and wandering star,

And shoved the bottle forward with a hellish, detached air,
Like minor fiends might serve lost souls in Torment and Despair.

A most insidious poison! Why should a rotted gut
Be cause of exultation, or make the patient strut?

Personal liberty. Their Fetish! That is their joy and pride;
The school to which such men belong holds briefs for suicide.

No small part of the tangle, the official missing-link,
Who raids the local pigsear to consume the stock of drink.

Who can judge the issue, or use his commonsense
With the appalling squealing of the pigs caught in the fence?

"They have stricken us," they now explain, "and when we were not sick
They beat us when we felt it not! It was a dirty trick!"

And so they shout and bicker, and utter perverse things,
And when a joint is broken up, the court with anguish rings.

Law makes a desert, calls it peace; it is not more nor less,
Than Zion redeemed with judgment, and condemned to righteousness.
I have wandered through the cities, seen the standard, stunted mind;
Moved by studied tides of passion by the evilly inclined;
Seen towns draw as to a vortex more than half the human race;
Seen the rat-look form and fix itself upon the urban face.
Greed looks through the windows of the avaricious soul,
As they shape the markets, cutting down the farmer's dole.
They have enslaved the farmer by luring him to debt.
The limbs refused the belly food, a lesson they forget.
Two years of storm and stress is used to market one fat tup,
The city men get more than half for cutting of him up.
The time has come the farmer feels, the strain, the breaking point,
He knows the evil of the day, the times are out of joint.
The years of no reward will pass, the fields will fallow lie.
The greedy cities then too late will hear the hunger cry.
History repeats itself. The Reign of Terror dread,
Was nothing more nor less the lack and need and howl for bread.
You call men great who govern us by grace of midget votes.
You do not see the tarnish on the tinsel of their coats.
O, well, we all hold seeds of death, are measured for our shrouds;
'Not in our time, O Lord,' we pray, affrighted at the clouds.
Now I have done, I know not why I wasted time and ink,
The Zone of Fracture shook Japan, but made no nation think.
All I am sure of is that work is more than half divine,
With work life is endurable, existence made more fine.
Genius, he who has it, may find that it is plain,
Is infinite capacity for giving others pain.
And so good bye. God bless you, as on you groping go,
For I lay down my torture pen to find peace in a hoe